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CLAIMS

1.   A method for managing a healthcare patient account lifecycle comprising the steps of:

identifying a plurality of flashpoints corresponding to defined

5   operations in the patient account lifecycle;

providing an output at said plurality of flashpoints, said outputs comprising a control report; and

converting at least one control report from a first flashpoint into an input for a subsequent flashpoint, the input for a subsequent flashpoint including at

10   least one of a checklist, an alert, and an edit relating to information required for obtaining payment from a healthcare payor.

2.   The method of claim 1 wherein said flashpoints include patient contact events comprising a pre–registration phase, an admission/registration phase, an in–house phase, and a discharge phase.

3.   The method of claim 1 wherein said flashpoints include post–discharge events comprising a suspense phase, a billing phase, and a follow–up/collections phase.

4.   The method of claim 1 wherein data from each flashpoint is output to a centralized management unit, said centralized management unit adding missing data in the form of an edit, or returning a checklist to the flashpoint operator with alerts to obtain said missing data.

5.   The method of claim 4 further comprising a centralized manager who generates control reports, said control reports being used to highlight missing data required for obtaining payment from a payor, and who obtains said missing data from a source outside the centralized management unit.

6.   The method of claim 5 wherein said source outside the centralized management unit comprises at least one of healthcare provider, patient, or payor.

7.   The method of claim 4 comprising a communications network between the centralized management unit and a healthcare provider, and a plurality of encryption devices located in said communications network, said encryption devices establishing an encrypted session over the communications network and

5   including a means for authenticating remote managers in the central management unit whereby the central management unit can manage patient lifecycle accounts.

8.   The method of claim 7 wherein said communications network comprises the Internet.

9.   The method of claim 7 wherein said encryption device comprises a firewall VPN router.

10.   The method of claim 7 wherein digital certificates are used to authenticate managers in the centralized management unit.

11.   The method of claim 4 comprising an encrypted communications network between the centralized management unit and the healthcare provider, a web browser, a database management system, and a software application, and including the step of using said software application via the web

5   browser over the encrypted communications network to store patient account data in the database management system whereby a healthcare provider can outsource any portion or all of its patient accounts for management by the centralized management unit.

12.   The method of claim 11 wherein the encrypted communications network comprises a secure sockets layer, the Internet, and digital certificates for authentication.

13.   The method in claim 4 further comprising outputting operating reports from the centralized management unit detailing the performance of the method for managing a patient account lifecycle and providing information for analysis of the performance of the method whereby improvements can be traced to

5   particular flashpoints and operators requiring additional training or support.

14.   The method of claim 13 further comprising pre–determined standards for comparison to determine the level of performance of the centralized management unit.

15.   The method of claim 14 wherein said standards comprise Gross Accounts Receivable Days by Financial Class, Accounts Receivable Balance by Financial Class, Average Daily Revenue by Financial Class, Cash Variance, Unbilled Accounts Balance, Unbilled Days, Bad –Debt Write–Off Balance, Bad–Debt

5   Recoveries, Credit Balance, and Average Daily Revenue by Service.

16.   The method of claim 7 further comprising a database management system in the centralized management unit wherein the healthcare provider transfers a portion of post–discharge patient accounts for management by the centralized management unit, said centralized management unit using the

5   communications network to update the healthcare provider's patient account system directly whereby the centralized management unit is not required to maintain and coordinate a duplicate set of patient accounts.

17.   A system for managing a healthcare patient account lifecycle comprising a healthcare provider, a centralized management unit, a communications network between the healthcare provider and the centralized management unit, the communications network including a plurality of encryption devices establishing an

5   encrypted session over the communications network and including a means for authenticating remote account managers in the centralized management unit, and said centralized management unit accessing patient account information from the healthcare provider and providing information to the healthcare provider for managing information retrieval required for billing a healthcare payor.

18.   The system of claim 17 wherein the centralized management unit generates and transmits to the healthcare provider information relating to at least one of a checklist, an alert, and an edit relating to information required for payment from a healthcare payor.

19.   The system of claim 17 further including a web browser, a database management system, and a software application, the database management system storing patient account data received from the healthcare provider by the centralized management unit whereby a healthcare provider can outsource any

5   portion or all of its patient accounts for management by the centralized management unit.

20.   The method of claim 17 wherein said communications network comprises the Internet.

21.   The method of claim 17 wherein said encryption device comprises a firewall VPN router.

22.   The method of claim 17 wherein digital certificates are used to authenticate managers in the centralized management unit.